

THE PLAIN VIEW

*A Quarterly Journal
concerned with human relations and with the quality of living*

SUMMER 1950

The Structure of Humanist Thought

H. J. BLACKHAM

Religion and Vocabulary

RICHARD NORTH

Thought and Action

PATRICK BENNER

The Crisis in the University

LORD CHORLEY

The Romantic Ideal in Marriage

VIRGINIA FLEMMING

Commentary, Book Reviews, and Correspondence

ONE SHILLING

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ISS review

ILLUSTRATED

AN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW FOR THE THOUGHTFUL

EDITED BY
GEOFFREY GODWIN

There was a crash in the dark silence of an arctic night, and a single survivor was flung from a burning aircraft into the deep snow. He was a French-Canadian physicist, a man who used to turn, for relief from his every-day work, to the writing of verse . . .

From that experience, from his thoughts and feelings in the three-day wait for rescue, he has written a long allegorical poem, in the form of a dialogue between himself and the symbolic peasant Adam . . .

AFTER THE CRASH, by Jacques le Maitre, is published for the first time in our Summer Number, now available, together with articles by Professor W. J. ROSE, E. W. MARTIN, P. HAVARD-WILLIAMS, PETER WARWICK, and others.

SIXPENCE

FIFTY NINE GLOUCESTER PLACE, LONDON, W.1

THE PLAIN VIEW

Edited by H. J. BLACKHAM

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Ὦ μὲν ὀλίγον οὐχ ἱκανόν, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο γε οὐδὲν ἱκανόν. —EPICURUS

The man who is not satisfied with little is satisfied with nothing

UBERTATES ET COPIAE VIRTUTIS

—CICERO

the productiveness and the resources of human quality

THIS IS THAT WHICH WILL INDEED DIGNIFY AND EXALT KNOWLEDGE, IF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION MAY BE MORE NEARLY AND STRAITLY CONJOINED AND UNITED TOGETHER THAN THEY HAVE BEEN; A CONJUNCTION LIKE UNTO THAT OF THE TWO HIGHEST PLANETS SATURN THE PLANET OF REST AND CONTEMPLATION, AND JUPITER, THE PLANET OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACTION.

—BACON

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What the plain view perceives is neither obvious nor obscure

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COMMENTARY

A NEW SOCIETY. The social order known as *laissez-faire* has a name which usefully keeps one in mind of its origin as a protest against and a riddance of the vestiges of the medieval order based on status, and also of its tendency to anarchy. The anarchy which it produces is not the amiable individualism of idealists but the struggle for power of gigantic sectional interests, notably of course the movement of organized labour producing a politically conscious opportunism on the part of big industrial interests. The aim of socialism is to check the anarchy and restore an organic form of society. Marxist socialism assumes, on Marx's reading of history and nature and the operations of capitalist industry, that this can only be achieved by the outright and definitive triumph of organized Labour establishing absolute control by prolonged dictatorship. Democratic socialists believe that the anarchy can be healed by the long-term assimilative processes of history if the issue is not rudely forced. But of course not all trade unionists and not all supporters of the Labour Party in Great Britain are socialists. The Labour Party is partly inspired by a conscious ideal of democratic socialism; partly it is the historic thrust of self-assertion which brings about the crisis of anarchy rather than proposes a remedy; in smaller part it is the marxist determination totally to remake society in its own image. Perhaps this ambiguity cannot continue much longer. There would be advantages and disadvantages in clearing it up. On the one hand, the political strength of the party derived from its present cohesion and solidarity would be impaired; on the other, the present uncertainties are tending to make an unhealthy and explosive political atmosphere of fears and suspicions.

After all, is there really as much ambiguity as some seem to think? The existence of an independent communist party means that the marxist element in the Labour Party is not strong. The adherence of the trade unions to the political party means that they are prepared to participate in the responsibilities of government on the terms of power limited by the constitution. In these circumstances, not only is the Labour Party committed in effect to a democratic socialism by the conditions of the problem, but also the Conservative Party is equally committed. The problem of government is the problem of checking the anarchy of *laissez-faire* and restoring an organic form of society. Nobody believes that *laissez-faire* is still possible. There is still room for great differences both in policy and in administration, and the conflict of interests persists, but the differences are concerned with the same

problems and the conflict is not a conflict which threatens war but one which brings peace. By common consent, tacit though it is, the limits of conflict and anarchy have been reached and the whole community is headed in a new direction, which although it preserves the old elements transforms them by the new polarization.

To speak of an organic form of society is of course to invoke a vague and dangerous conception based on a false analogy. It is better to turn from political ideas and look at what is actually going on to see the shape of things. The professional organizations (including the trade unions), formed for more or less aggressive or defensive purposes, are being increasingly required to play an actively constructive part. The physical planning movement has put a stop to reckless exploitation and seeks to restore and to build up communities of optimum size and make-up, socially equipped to live and to live well. Education has swung round and abjured—in the only way possible, by a change of content—the sacrifice of the great majority to the select few. The productiveness of industry is being found to depend more on the humanization of relations and skilful, sensitive, day-by-day personal leadership than on financial operations and technical improvements. Nationalization, the most contentious of these changes that are going on, the most decisive check to *laissez-faire*, is in principle not a confusion of function but a condition of effective political co-ordination, the only way of gaining the authority of real power in the economic field, and therefore the pre-requisite of a national economy. These changes are the profoundest in history and call for correspondingly profound changes in attitudes. There is on the agenda the greatest of all matters, the humanization of man in society, which, as Matthew Arnold said, is civilization, and which we say is humanism. The political battle must go on, but the heart of affairs is on other fronts. Let the parties and the public get their political education by studying the new society that is in the making.

INDEPENDENTS. The elimination of the Independents from the present House of Commons is perhaps worth a sentimental tear. Genuine independence of mind although rare enough is to be found in both parties, and the Independents by label in the last House were notorious partisans or notorious eccentrics. No doubt it is a pity when politics are too closely contested to allow the luxury of ornamenting the House with a sprinkling of the oddities that abound in our society. The eccentric, with his peculiar views, ideals, or nostrums, is always with us, and it is nicer to pet than to pelt him. A democracy pullulates with sects and societies of

cranks and near-cranks, and although it is a condition of health that it should be possible for it to be so, it is a symptom of disease that it is so. The Independent who is eccentric is, however, far more tolerable than the Independent who is impartial. The politician who has a permanently open mind has a derangement which unfits him to take part in public affairs. The very issues are made by the party which is forcing the pace of policy, and by the form of the resistance and the alternatives to which it leads. The situation compels one to take sides if one is taking part, and there is no impartiality that is not ineptitude or hypocrisy.

Granted that the intelligent and honest politician cannot be impartial, it might yet be that there is so little to choose between the parties that taking sides is almost a matter of indifference. That might be the meaning of the General Election. For the statistical result of a conventional device for ensuring the continuance of legitimate government is not to be taken too solemnly as the declared will of a people. The same result is consistent with a people bitterly and equally divided and a people willing to choose but without strong preference. If it is supposed that the nation is bitterly divided, that conclusion has to be squared with the fact that there is more common ground between the parties than ever before. This common ground lies behind the parties, in acceptance of the great measures of social reform accomplished since the war; what divides them is the question of what is to come in regard to nationalization, taxation, public spending, and government control. Is the nation bitterly divided on this question? If so, it is not a simple conflict of interests but also a confusion of mind and a fever of fears. Such a conflict is not to be resolved by the affected independence of those who are between or above the party struggle, but by the goodwill and independence of those who take sides. That is the meaning of parliamentary democracy and it is now being put to the test. If there are enough minds in each party keen and independent enough to keep hold of the essential facts and issues, the outcome will show the best that such a regime can produce. But partisans, Independents, and eccentrics, if they prevail, will ruin the country. Of course, the Independents, impartial or eccentric, could not prevail anyhow, but it is a sign of healthy response to a serious turn in affairs that the electors had no use for them. The question remains whether there is enough genuine independence in the party members.

ALSO RAN. Some follies are serviceable to mankind in many ways beyond the reach of the most disinterested philanthropy. Take the business man who buys a horse of bloodstock and sends

him to a training establishment. Anxiously he inquires on the telephone each day and hears the latest on condition and form. In due course the animal is entered in the season's events for which he is eligible and, if he is fit, he starts, and he also runs. The industry thrives on unproductive capital and forlorn hopes, for what is a race without runners? Or take a similar industry, public school education. The successful professional man hopefully enters his son at birth, if not earlier, has him trained at an expensive establishment, and in due course he also starts and also runs. Many are called but few are chosen. It is the prodigality of nature.

Some take comfort in the thought that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but time and chance happeneth to them all": a fact too frail to redress the balance when the many are sacrificed to the few. Others fear that in the new order of things the few are to be sacrificed to the many, and that this is the worse evil, and against nature. It is hard to see how this can happen. The grammar and public schools will be filled with selected candidates, as training stables are filled with eligible blood-stock, and the few will be placed and the rest will also run. It is the logical fallacy of composition to suppose that because it is open to A or B or C to win scholarships or firsts, it is open to A and B and C. But when the many are lavishly catered for the unlucky rump of the selected minority will be wretched indeed, and it will not comfort them to be a "failed B.A." as it used to comfort the Indian baboo, for they will be as freaks deprived of a place in nature. That is what makes it the Century of the Common Man, when it is happier to be very ordinary than to run the risk of being privileged.

THE STRUCTURE OF HUMANIST THOUGHT

I

ANY school of thought can be represented schematically as a body of (1) assumptions (what is taken as sufficiently proved and what is held as necessarily true) upon which is founded the (2) affirmations (which may include denials) which give the thought its impetus, and the (3) decisions which route it into action, leaving as (4) open questions all uncertainties which need not be resolved for urgent practical purposes and all matters of individual choice. If these parts of thought articulated in a distinctive body of effective thinking are confused, the vitality of the thought is impaired. And to shuffle the content between the parts is to change the

thought. The division of a scheme of thought into these parts is not arbitrary, and may not be permanent: it is historical, a living response to the situation. For example, Christianity may assume the truth of its dogmas, affirm the authority and mission of the Church, and decide to restore Christendom; or it may assume the validity and value of human culture (pre-eminently of science and philosophy), affirm the universal claim of the personality and teaching of Jesus, and decide to establish the Kingdom of God on earth; or it may assume the existence of God, affirm the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and decide to call sinners to repentance. There is here both a persistent difference of content in christianity and an historical response to cultural change. Similarly, Humanism may assume the total competence of science, affirm the dialectical determinism of historical materialism, and decide on the dictatorship of the proletariat (obviously an historical phase in this scheme of thought); or it may assume a rationalistic positivism, affirm the fact and possibility of human progress by means of science, and decide to uphold democracy founded on social utility, and leave all questions open to free inquiry. These observations can be represented in a schema.

	<i>Assumptions</i>	<i>Affirmations</i>	<i>Decisions</i>	<i>Open Questions</i>
ROME	Theological dogmas	Authority and mission of the Church	Restoration of Christendom	—
MODERNISM ..	Value and validity of culture	Personality and ethical teaching of Jesus	Establishment of Kingdom of God on earth	Theological dogmas
FUNDAMENTALISM	God	Theological dogmas	Call sinners to repentance	Culture
MARXISM ..	Atheism	Historical materialism	Dictatorship of the proletariat	—
RATIONALISM	Positive science	Progress	Utilitarian democracy	All questions

However useful it may be to apply such a schema to making comparisons, its main use is in the working out of one's own scheme of thought, and the schema above is given entirely as exemplification and not as criticism. My purpose in this article is to use this form of analysis in order to discuss the structure of a modern liberal humanism.

II

ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions include what is proved, what is sufficiently probable not to be held in question, and presuppositions which cannot be proved but are held to be necessary to account for indubitable experience. If humanism rejects christianity on rational grounds, it assumes the competence of reason as final authority. If others find good reasons for their faith and deny that logic is competent to refute their claims, which must be admitted, it might seem that the rejection of christianity ought to be treated as a decision not as an assumption of its untruth. But if it is rejected on rational grounds the existence of reasons against the rejection is not sufficient to discredit the claim that the rejection is required by reason, so long as the reasons against rejection have been adequately accounted for. One must rather say that the rejection of christianity on rational grounds assumes not only the untruth of the dogmas of the faith but also definite criteria of reason and all that is philosophically involved in maintaining the final competence of reason so defined. Humanists are committed to this philosophical position in assuming the rationalist rejection of christian dogma.

Having assumed the sovereign competence of reason, is Humanism justified in rounding off the scientific evidence and assuming the truth of naturalism, the view, that is, that mind is an emergent novelty in the universe, a product of biological evolution, and that the universe is without meaning and value, independent of human thinking and willing, since meaning and value are purely human categories? There are reasons for treating this view as (1) an assumption, (2) an affirmation, (3) a decision, (4) an open question. These reasons must be considered.

(1) Since naturalism can be neither proved nor disproved, there seems to be no case for treating it as an assumption. However, there is no empirical generalization which is not in the same danger because of the limits of human knowledge; and if a view is immensely probable on the available evidence, it is not improper to assume its truth and to think and act on that assumption.

(2) Since humanism is attacked for its adherence to naturalism, and since it is this view which makes all the difference between humanism and theism or a metaphysical idealism, it is in this view that the distinctiveness of humanism lies, and it cannot therefore be treated as less than the full and positive affirmation of humanism, the view which makes humanism what it is.

(3) Since there can be no final theoretical certainty one way or the other, it is a matter for a practical decision, because life has to be lived one way or the other.

(4) Since it really is an open question, it should be left an open question. After all, there are metaphysical idealists and theists who are humanists in a real sense, and who even claim that theirs is the true humanism and that their metaphysical views are essential to humanism. To exclude these is to impoverish humanism and reduce it to a narrow and dogmatic sect. If an unprovable naturalism is made the test and meaning of humanism, the liberal and catholic quality which has been its distinctiveness and attraction will be sacrificed, and the loss will be irreparable for it will alienate some of the finest minds.

None of these arguments is spurious. It is no exaggeration to say that a humanist movement will be largely determined in its character by its treatment of naturalism, and that any of the four alternatives is possible. The brunt of the decision is between (4) and the others. There can be no doubt that to decide against (4) is to exclude many whom we should desire to have with us. In any case, (4) appeals to generous, tolerant, reasonable minds impressed with the immense complexity and mystery of existence. I therefore find it painful to have to conclude that (4) must be rejected. In practice, we either believe in and seek to discover independent absolute meaning and value in the universe in order to inform and inspire our will to live, or we do not believe in and therefore do not look for antecedent meaning and value but take the possibilities of human living as we find them and develop them as we can. There is here a difference in orientation which cannot be left unresolved because it is anyhow necessarily resolved in practice—and if it were not, it would be a matter of indifference which could therefore be left an open question. However, to make naturalism the affirmation or the decision of humanism in its scheme of thought is to assimilate it to rationalism and ruin its efficiency by turning its flank to the wind-stream. As such it has no independent purpose, it is a vehicle without a motor. A properly constructed streamlined humanism has for its purpose to inform and inspire human living on naturalist premises. Therefore the proper place for naturalism in a humanist scheme of thought is with the assumptions.

AFFIRMATIONS

Assuming the truth of naturalism, how shall we live? There is no will of God, no independent meaning or value in nature or

in an ideal realm open to intuition, no necessity in history. These are the terms of life. If there is any such thing as choice, we are free to choose whether we shall live or not. This is the radical and the most purely personal choice: there is no sense in my looking for guidance in making such a choice. But the choice is abstract and meaningless apart from the terms on which it is made. The terms of life are of course vastly affected by human action and within this range there is all the difference between favourable terms universally attractive and terms so bad that few would choose to accept them and live. But beyond this range of variation are the constant terms of the human lot. It is these terms which the religions have been concerned to define, abstracting from the variations of time and place and ignoring the possibilities of improvement by human action. For humanists, these terms are the terms defined in naturalism, and humanism in the first place is a choice of life, the will to live on these terms.

Such a choice of life is still very abstract, for it is the special terms of one's own mental and bodily inheritance and conditions of time and place which come home to one as the frustrations or the opportunities which invite acceptance or suggest rejection. Nevertheless the special terms of each personal case stand in the context of the general terms of the human situation and get their meaning from that context. All the religions recognize this, and most of them require their adherents to make a radical refusal of life on natural terms, however advantageous and tempting their personal position may be. Humanism, on the contrary, is itself the choice of those who have made a radical acceptance of life on natural terms however disadvantageous their personal position may be. The secret of humanism lies in what makes it possible to choose to live on the terms of naturalism in a disadvantageous personal position. If the affirmations of humanism cannot help here they have nothing of importance to say.

The world as we find it is a human world worked over with great elaboration and embodying multiplied achievement. From the point of view of man in general it is a world of infinite scope and interest, a world always in the making and always being achieved. This is amply exemplified in all the diversity of human tasks and enterprises. In the arts, for instance, classical achievements form taste, set standards, and inspire effort, by showing what can be done; but the arts go on, and new work continues to explore the inexhaustible possibilities, instructed but not restricted by what has been done. The endless recurrence of seasonal work and the endless succession of generations is witness to the finality of achievement and to its perpetual living replacement. Achievement is final

because it is not the means to some further achievement which is permanent. Its finality includes the whole complex of which it is the final member, and to make it permanent would be to destroy the living process as well as the other possibilities. In short, this is a life to be loved, studied, invented, lived, and idealized with all one's heart and with all one's mind and with all one's strength. Indeed, it is the relation of just such beings as we are to just such a world as this is that is the lure of life, and it is the unfailing excitement of this reality that is the inspiration of humanism.

This choice and affirmation of life on the terms of naturalism is from the point of view of man in general. It is a point of view which can be entirely lost to the individual sunk in the conditions of his personal lot, struggling against handicaps of his inheritance, adversities of his fortune, and perversities of his fellows. The affirmations of humanism are about the relation of man to the world and the possibilities of human living which spring from it and its mission is to restore to the individual and sustain in him the point of view of man; for the frustration of the individual is never final if the effort to overcome it is seen to be worth while, and from the point of view of man it can be seen to be worth while. But the point of view of man is not merely lost to the individual hard pressed by the personal problems he is trying to cope with, it is really lost altogether if men collectively are perverse enough to mistake, or reject, or violate the terms of life. We are bound to each other for good and evil. "Society is indeed a contract. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection." Humanism is staked on the issue of whether mankind will sufficiently fulfil this partnership. Since the issue turns on individual decisions, humanism is a serious call to a creative life. The resources created by the social partnership are available for the plenitude of personal life: but only if the partnership is genuine. This is the solidarity of mankind, the brotherhood of man, and humanism is this solidarity, this brotherhood, this partnership in all perfection.

Thus humanism affirms a will to live on the terms of naturalism, initiates men into the possibilities of life on these terms, and calls on all men to live in this way and to bear witness that this is the true human life.

DECISIONS

A scheme of thought is itself a body of decisions. We have to decide what the alternatives are and to decide between them. The facts never speak for themselves so unmistakably that personal decisions are not required in interpreting and acting on them. A

scheme of thought like a work of art is a piece of invention inspired and limited by the possibilities of the material used. In a recent book the writer described himself as a "humanist." "Such a man accepts as final the contentions of no one school, but keeps his heart and mind open to all influences, whether ancient or modern, which can claim the loyalty and esteem of educated men and women." If this is humanism it requires a qualifying epithet, and perhaps parasitical humanism would properly describe its character. The fear of being labelled exposes one to the most ignominious and helpless ticketing. Humanists must take their decisions and abide by them and work them out, and never cease to challenge others on them.

Not only is the scheme of thought itself constituted by decisions, it must include the practical decisions by which it becomes effective. If we affirm the will to live on naturalist terms, we are committed to full responsibility for our lives: we have to purge out every trace of resentment, rebellion, and indifference. This cannot be a negative operation, it is the result of unstinted creative effort. And since such individual effort has very little meaning apart from the like efforts of others with which it is involved, humanists have no choice but to try to bring others to their view and to their commitment. Humanism is the enterprise of humanity, understanding and accepting the terms of life. Thus it demands the whole man and all men, and is in no sense a merely theoretical view or a mere attitude, still less the mere rejection of a religious view.

OPEN QUESTIONS

Humanists, for the sake of candour and toleration, will want to leave open as many as possible of the questions which are not in all probability settled by abundant evidence. The exigencies of life require that some of the most important of these questions be settled by practical decisions. There is a case against naturalism, but it has to be decided one way or the other. What questions really can be left open?

One might say that at least the technical questions of epistemology and ethical theory remain open, but commitment to empiricism, naturalism, and the humanist choice of life is already commitment to fundamental positions in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and even politics; humanism as a vital movement springing from experience is already committed to a philosophy which will explain and justify these positions. The truth is that no important question can remain open; to the extent to which it remains open it is indifferent, or meaningless, because the way in

which it is answered makes no practical difference to human living. If liberal rationalism declared that all questions are open questions, that did not mean that they really were open in the sense that men were not called on to make up their minds and decide for themselves; it meant that liberal rationalism was not seeking to unite men on any particular body of views and decisions; it was protesting against the social dominance of a particular dogmatic scheme and insisting on the social utility of open inquiry and free discussion. Humanism has to maintain the firm, articulated, vital body of its scheme of thought, with its universal claim and challenge, and at the same time frankly and gladly accept the liberal principle that it must make good its claim and challenge in free discussion and by example and success, and not by power politics. Humanists should not be confused by the validity of the liberal and rationalist principles, which they accept, and fear to make up their minds and take their stand on an effective body of thought. There are open questions before one has made up one's mind, and there is the possibility of changing one's mind, but there are no questions that matter which are, as it were, open in themselves—save in the literal sense that every question as question is open. To keep questions open is as superstitious as to keep virginity inviolate for its own sake. It is to mistake the phase of suspense in scientific inquiry and the phase of intellectual emancipation in social history for an absolute principle. Humanism is a body of assumptions, affirmations, and decisions, and seeks to make good the validity of these assumptions, affirmations, and decisions for all men. It cannot be otherwise.

The real vitality of the open question principle is found in the decisions and choices of day by day personal living. Humanism is the will to live on the terms of naturalism, and thereby prescribes an approach to life and a way of living, but it does not prescribe particular aims and values, which must always remain personal, within the limits imposed by overriding social aims and values, which are themselves not prescribed in their positive particularity by humanism. In this sense the real meaning of humanism is found here in the open questions as they are decided day by day in personal lives and social policies, in so far as they are decided according to humanist assumptions, affirmations, and commitments.

III

The virtue of a scheme of thought, by which it should be tested, is in its use of essentials to give insight into and mastery over all the relevant detail, just as the correct and fruitful definition

seizes on the essential attribute from which all other distinctive characteristics flow as propria. Humanism does not put into its primitive affirmations a doctrine of human personality, nor a declaration of social ideals, nor an ethical code, because these things are derivative; a general appreciation of the human situation and of the scope and nature of human living comes first because it is this appreciation and the response which springs from it that is decisive: this approach is fundamental to humanism; it is the key decision of this scheme of thought. The character of the scheme is itself vital decision. It is not primarily philosophical: it is an act of the whole man rooted in experience and initiating in one impulse a life and a philosophy.

H. J. BLACKHAM

RELIGION AND VOCABULARY

ONE can say, "I cut it with a knife." And one can say (unless one is a no-preposition-at-end fiend), "It was a knife I cut it with." One can also say, "I cut it with difficulty." But one cannot say, no matter what one's prepositional taste, "It was difficulty I cut it with."

That example of English idiom is familiar to everybody. There are plenty of text-books to inform the curious how to avoid bad and acquire good idiom, but there are unfortunately fewer that pay attention to that far harder problem—how to make sentences that shall carry to the listener the precise idea in the mind of the speaker. What do the words mean, both in their individual function as separate words and in their collective function as a group intended to convey an idea?

In the first pair of sentences above, the meaning is clear to all, because everybody knows what a knife is. But in the second pair the exact meaning cannot be clear to anybody except the speaker, because the hearers have not been told what the difficulty was. It is impossible for the listeners to understand all that is in the speaker's mind until some further words have been used to explain the nature of the difficulty—the resistance of the material, the bluntness of the tool, the awkwardness of contact, or what not.

From that simple illustration of incomplete transference of meaning the reader is asked to carry his imagination into those fields of thought where there are few tangible things to correspond with the names given to them—not many knives but very many difficulties. Metaphysics and philosophy are two such regions, and it is obvious from its incessant and universal misunderstandings that modern politics is rapidly becoming a third. The particular field which this paper proposes to examine is religion.

Religious vocabulary abounds with words of undefined values. Many of them are closely associated with the emotions, and their employment brings into operation the feelings as well as (or quite commonly instead of) the reason—two components of human nature that are generally in fierce antagonism. Let it be understood at once that this is no attempt to depreciate emotional values. It would be a poorer world if logic usurped the seat of feeling. But the tendency in human nature is exactly the reverse. Emotion is the usurper, and those who are engaged in the objective search for discoverable truth must be constantly on the watch to prevent its encroachments.

No better illustration could be found of what might be called the multiple significance of terms than the word "spiritual." Where is there another word with so great a variety of interpretation? There is no handier word for those who are unable or unwilling to be specific, and its accommodating versatility fits it into every sort of religious context. It has darkened counsel since language began, and it will live up to its reputation as long as it is tolerated. Its lack of precision for the speaker is multiplied to infinity for the listener, and unless the term is prohibited, or at least subjected to the strictest definition, its employment can only intensify bewilderment and lessen light.

It is happily true that the extension of knowledge gradually reduces the "spiritual" territory. Not long ago an epidemic was a very "spiritual" phenomenon indeed, only to be cured by much supplication—and perhaps a little sulphur. So was a comet, and a rainbow still retains something of its personal and intimate "spirituality," even if those who know quite well what it is do feel rather ashamed of themselves for cherishing a bit of Noah's theory also. The invasion will continue as knowledge increases, but the progress of knowledge is slow and the field of ignorance is wide. For a very long time to come those who desire their words to mean something must eschew "spiritual" or rigidly define it.

The vocabulary of western religion, which the example of scientific terminology ought to have clarified, abounds in such dark-nesses. How many honest but muddled minds have vibrated over that "great discovery" of Martin Luther's, "The just shall live by faith," where each of the three major terms of the proposition can mean a thousand different things to a thousand different believers? Not very long ago a lady of international distinction in medicine, literature, and sociology told a school of girls on speech day, "Remember, you are made up of three parts—body, soul, and spirit." A recent religious broadcast spoke of "The spark of God

in the soul of man," and anybody can discover in a few minutes of random reading or listening plenty of such abstractions. Here is a very small selection to be met with daily: "Sin," "Our Father which art in heaven," "Eternal life," "Christian gentleman," "The Kingdom of God," "Free will," "God save the King," "The Christian Faith."

Such are the terms in common use in the pulpit, on the air, and in the press; we become familiar with them during the early years of childhood, and we hear them till we die. If they are susceptible of definition they are certainly not defined, and it needs no Socrates to confound their users by a few simple questions. But the questioner will not be thanked, for such sifting is not popular. The dispassionate valuation of terms is not a pastime, and intuitive conclusions are easier than reasoned ones. Words with moral and emotional associations, and words that carry mental comfort, are always weighted with ponderous valuations, and it can generally be safely assumed that the affections have entangled the reason to the point of strangulation.

Let me repeat, in case there is still danger of misapprehension, that my quarrel with such expressions is upon no other ground whatever than that, unless they are accompanied by elaborate definition, they cannot be understood. The speaker's concept of them, even if it is clear to him (which is doubtful, for clear thinkers try to avoid woolly words), will not be the concept of his listeners, who in turn will differ widely among themselves.

Unfortunately for the future of religion the vocabulary fog has been thickening for half a century and is now thicker than ever. The universal acceptance of evolution that followed swiftly upon Darwin's exposition of that theory necessitated extensive adjustments in accepted theology and consequent drastic modifications in religious terminology. It is to the credit of Christianity that its opposition, ferocious though it was, soon gave way to a more constructive reaction. Restatement followed restatement with bewildering speed, and Christian theology has since been swamped with such a spate of explanations, interpretations, adjustments, and new approaches that there is to-day in western Protestantism scarcely any minimum of belief required of communicants. No more than ordinary citizenship (of poor enough quality to be sure nowadays) will admit an applicant into almost any sect, and if any enquiry at all is made about his creed it will be very timid and perfunctory.

All this has occurred in a period when advances in other fields have been accompanied by an insistence upon precision of terms. At every step scientific vocabulary has been clarified, and the

elimination of misunderstanding through mere failure to apprehend terms is a deliberate part of scientific effort. In religion the very reverse is the case. While scientific terminology continually improves in clarity religious terminology continually deteriorates. Each restatement is less specific than its predecessor, doctrines once clear become cloudy, and simplicity yields to complexity.

Before the nebulous apologists enriched Christianity with a God in whose blood men are the phagocytes, religious truth consisted of a series of dogmas which one denied or even doubted at one's peril. However false, cruel, or absurd the creeds, our fathers knew what they meant. They even knew what heaven and hell meant, and they had a tolerably accurate idea of the division of labour in the Trinity. But to-day an enquirer would find it very difficult to discover what the Trinity itself is, let alone the functions of its members.

There are many sincere Christians who feel that religion need not, and indeed should not, show the same concern for its terms as science. The scientist deals with concrete things and needs concrete words. The religious man deals with mysterious things and needs abstract words. Vagueness is of the essence of the subject, and Chesterton's views upon definition are proper:

"The thing that cannot be defined is the first thing; the primary fact. It is our arms and legs, our pots and pans, that are indefinable. The indefinable is the indisputable. The man next door is indefinable, because he is too actual to be defined. And there are some to whom spiritual things have the same fierce and practical proximity; some to whom God is too actual to be defined."

In such company our old friend "spiritual" is quite at home. Is it not the aim of investigators in every province of knowledge to make uncertainty certain and the mysterious understandable? Every additional object drawn into the net of definition adds to the sum of human information, and facilitates communication. However indefinable the limbs, the clothing that covers them must be defined—with some accuracy, too, as to colour, cut, and quality, and with considerable accuracy as to cost. And it should have occurred to Mr. Chesterton that if man has not yet defined God it is not for want of trying. In the name of all that is honest and upright religion must get rid of such nonsense. If to-day we can but determine the boundaries of our parish, to-morrow we shall know a continent, and afterwards, perhaps, we may define the universe.

From such an examination as the preceding, one certain con-

clusion emerges—that the particular attribute of language which more than any other distinguishes man from the rest of creation has hitherto been extolled with an extravagance by no means justified by the facts. As scientific enquiry proceeds the defects of language are revealed. Every text-book inculcates the use of the best words, but few warn us that the best words are often not good enough. However careful the language packing, ideas cannot be preserved from damage in transit. This is a discovery of such supreme importance that humanity is in actual danger of perishing for sheer lack of an efficient communication apparatus. Enlightened groups and individuals are aware of the need. In some departments of science improved symbol systems have been deliberately adopted in order to filter meaning, and men like Ogden and Richards have perceived the dangers of primitive linguistic habits and have urged reform.

I have attempted to show that religion is one of the worst sufferers from defective communication, and that she has brought it upon herself during a quite recent period. If it is true that progress is proportionate to the efficiency of the communication symbols, and that a loosening of terms brings a loosening of grip, the religious outlook is dismal. Indifference will spread and open hostility will increase. Viscount Halifax has recently deplored that “the very words which express the central dogmas of the Christian faith have lost all intelligible meaning for a large proportion of our contemporaries.” And he fears that “a diminishing band of Christians, satisfied to speak a language of their own, will be increasingly ignored by active minds, estranged . . . by a genuine failure to comprehend what is said.” The prognosis is as probable as the diagnosis is accurate.

RICHARD NORTH

THOUGHT AND ACTION

I

IN a recent article,* I briefly considered some of the general problems of epistemology. The conclusions reached suggested that it is possible to achieve truth, and know that one has achieved it, only in comparatively rare circumstances—namely, when one is concerned with a tautologous proposition (of geometry or logic, for example) which is true by definition. There was a large class of propositions which, since they could be verified by empirical means, were probably, and even very probably true. Finally, there were propositions which could not be satisfactorily verified and were yet meaningful, and upon which no definite pronouncement as to truth or falsehood could be made. A number of statements about morals, politics and aesthetics seemed to fall into this class.

One of the faults of discussions of epistemological problems is that they are apt to appear arid and theoretical and therefore of little genuine value except in so far as they give pleasure to those who delight in trying to solve intellectual puzzles. The fault is a serious one, for the problems which we find the most urgent and the most intractable are generally practical ones—we want to know, for example, how to vote at an election, or how far we ought to gratify our own wishes and how far those of other people. Philosophers sometimes say that these are not matters for philosophy and, indeed, that there is no point in asking such questions. The argument runs something as follows: Only propositions which are tautologous or empirically verifiable can be true or false and therefore only they can be literally significant. Statements about conduct—i.e. statements relating to moral and political problems—are generally not empirically verifiable, are practically never tautologous, and therefore are not literally significant. Hence moral problems must be posed as questions to which, even in principle, no answer can be given, and therefore are not really problems at all. The answer is an ingenious one, but since it fails to charm away the problems it is of no practical help—I continue to wonder what I ought to do even after I have been told that I am asking myself a meaningless question. Plainly this simple answer is not enough, and we must go into the matter more fully and sympathetically. That is what I wish to try to do now.

But a caution is necessary first. An empirical approach to morals and politics (and aesthetics) involves certain difficulties of presentation just because one of the first things to be observed is

**Knowing and believing*, Plain View, Vol. IV, No. 3.

that men think and behave very differently. Not only does one think good or beautiful what another thinks bad or ugly, but one finds a problem where another does not. I, for example, may find it hard to decide whether under given circumstances I ought to do what I want or what my friend wants; someone else in similar circumstances might embark on a course of action without thinking that any problem was involved. This means that generalizations must often be misleading. So I wish to make it clear that when I make a general statement about actual moral judgments it will be based on my own experience and observations: those of other people may well be different. On the other hand, statements about the theory of morals and politics—that is, about epistemology—are intended to have a general application.

II

The theory of objective values is both attractive and influential, so we might begin by enquiring whether goodness, evil, beauty and the rest are qualities which objectively belong to persons, actions and things. It is in the first place clear that they do not “belong” in any ordinary sense; I say that a picture has colour because I receive a sense-perception of colour, but I do not say that it is beautiful because I receive a sense perception of beauty *quâ* beauty. What I perceive is a combination of coloured forms and nothing more; beauty, since it is not perceived as are the other qualities, is evidently something superadded. It may be that, though the senses do not inform us of it directly, we become aware of it when we receive certain sense-perceptions of colour, shape, and so on. In general, it is possible that the reception of certain sense-perceptions occasions intuitions of moral or aesthetic qualities. The latter would thus be objective but non-natural—i.e., not a part of the sensible world.

I have chosen this line of argument because I think it is the most convincing way of putting the case for objective values. It is, in fact, the type of argument used by modern intuitionist writers on morals, who maintain that good, right, etc., are objective, non-sensible qualities which cannot be analysed into anything else—just as “yellow”, for example, is a simple notion which is indefinable and cannot be analysed further, so “good” is a simple, indefinable notion. Now I am inclined to think that this account is in accord with the experience of those people—and they are many—who accept good, right, beauty, etc., as values and as notions which defy analysis: that is to say, they find that their idea of “good” cannot be as it were “explained away” by substituting for it a number of propositions about pleasure, whether their own or others’. We may

therefore agree that the intuitionists have given a true picture of human experience (or, rather, of the experiences of some humans); but can we follow them in the remainder of their arguments?

Briefly, the Intuitionist argument is: I am convinced in my own mind that goodness and beauty are values; it therefore follows that values have an independent and objective existence. It is obvious that this argument is invalid and must always be so until it has been proved that qualities exist because someone believes they do. No such proof is possible, for the reasons mentioned in my previous article. The Intuitionists are not making tautologous statements, yet only in respect of such statements are logical proofs obtainable.

Probabilities can be expressed by statements which, at least theoretically, are susceptible of empirical verification; but this is impossible in respect of objective values, which are non-sensible. It was clear at first inspection that the argument was worthless, and this explanation merely shows why it must necessarily be so.

This, of course, is not an absolute disproof of Intuitionism—disproof is unobtainable—but it is evidence against it. There is additional evidence in the well-known fact which I have already mentioned, that people differ widely in their moral, political and aesthetic judgments. If there were objective values, and if they were known by a rational intuitive process, one would expect people—or at any rate people of equal intelligence and culture—to make similar judgments; yet they do not. It seems, then, either that objective values are a myth or that, if they do exist, we can neither know what they are nor even be sure of their existence.

Finally, it is worth referring to the well-known principle that in accounting for phenomena one should not posit unnecessary hypothetical entities. It is clear from what has gone before that objective values are hypothetical—very much so. It is also clear, I think, that they are unnecessary. Intuitionists usually maintain that in the moral field we will a thing because we know it to be good; but modern psychology has shown that it is possible to account for such volitions without having to appeal to some non-natural factor which, like a *deus ex machina*, providentially appears in order to determine what we will. Moral behaviour therefore is not unintelligible unless we posit the existence of objective values, and therefore we should avoid doing so.

Taken together, I consider that these arguments are very strong and justify our denying the claims of the Intuitionists, even though they have given an acceptable account of what is experienced by many people. The conclusion is perhaps disappointing, for it would be pleasant to know that there were objective values; an assurance of

their existence would mean that added effort might enable us to become acquainted with them, and thereby allow us to hope that our doubts, irresolutions and self-reproaches might one day be smoothed away and we ourselves become citizens of a moral and spiritual world. There are people who have undergone experiences of this sort, but our arguments suggest that the explanation is to be sought by an examination of their own mental processes rather than by attributing the experiences to the influence of an unseen realm of values.

III

The argument of the previous section has resulted in our throwing away the bath-water of Intuitionism while keeping the baby of moral and aesthetic experience. May we perhaps solve our difficulties by following those who bravely throw away the baby as well? Can we say that ethics is a sham and that there is no valid distinction between moral and other sorts of experience? Arguments of this sort have sometimes been put forward, and a recent example is to be found in Mrs. Lan Freed's *Social Pragmatism*. She believes that the moralists—who include nearly all previous writers on ethical matters—have been confused and mistaken, and have perverted the meaning of such terms as “good” and “right”; these words, properly used, do not have any peculiarly ethical connotation, but merely denote approval of whatever is productive of liked experience; they are, in fact, instrumental words, and “ought” must be taken as meaning “if you want . . .”. Then, by means of a sympathy principle (i.e. by maintaining that benevolence and self-love are to a large extent identical) she attains a universal view-point and uses her instrumental words “good”, “right”, etc., in working out a social policy. By these means she claims to have done away with ethics and to have replaced it by the scientific conception of Social Pragmatism, which is based on the clear and definable notion of “liked experience”.

In my submission, the claim is baseless and the arguments supporting it are unlikely to convert anyone who is not already inclined to the author's way of thinking.

In the first place, the conclusion depends on an arbitrary definition involving the identification of the term “moral conduct” with Kantianism. The passage is worth quoting at length:—

“Finally, there is the Kantian or neo-Christian school, which holds that morality stands for self-denying conduct, by contrast with conduct motivated by the agent's desire for anything. Personally I think that the latter conception gives the term ‘morality’ its only peculiar and distinctive significance; thus I

should call moral conduct, 'conduct motivated by the desire to act from no motive', and keep the term to mean this only."*

It is highly unsatisfactory to attack Kantianism and, having disposed of it to one's own satisfaction, to claim to have shown that peculiarly "moral" conduct is illusory—the victory is at most a verbal one. In any case, to show that Kant's moral theories are open to criticism does not prove that the data upon which they are founded are in any sense unreal or imaginary.

That brings us to Mrs. Freed's contention that "good" and "right" are purely instrumental words used to express approval of whatever is productive of liked experience. This is an essential part of her theory, for if it cannot be substantiated, she loses her chance of converting those who are not of her way of thinking. It is at once clear that not everyone does in fact use "good" and "right" only as instrumental words, for we know that many people are convinced that they are using "good" in different senses when speaking of a "good man" and "a good pair of scissors". We must therefore next ask: If these people thoroughly analysed the concepts to which they refer by the word "good", would they after all find that they could be completely expressed by translating them into terms of "liked experience"?

This is a sensible question, but I think that the answer must be: No, not always. Mrs. Freed's theory involves us in maintaining that, when we speak of "a good man", we are using "good" in the same sense as when, during the war, we spoke of German bombers as good—i.e. as efficient. Now this seems absurd, for while we may in general approve of efficiency, the approval would clearly be greatly outweighed by the disapproval caused by the "disliked experience" of having bombs dropped on us and our friends—bombs which might not have been dropped had the aeroplanes been less efficient. But this is not conclusive; it shows that the word "good" is not, or need not be, always used in precisely the same sense, but it does not show that the senses in which it is used are not all instrumental. It is still possible that we describe a man as "good" only because he is on the whole an originator of "liked experiences".

I think that there is a conclusive answer to this, which we may find by examining a crucial passage from *Social Pragmatism*:—

"So the thing we call good, whatever it is, is the thing we think will be, or could be, an agency of some form of liked experience; as which we approve of it."†

Two important points seem to be neglected here. The first was

**Social Pragmatism*, p. 180.

†*Ibid*, p. 163.

made famous by Mill when he remarked, in contradiction to Bentham, that it is a fact of experience that many men do not take pleasure as their sole standard—that is to say, they do not judge and grade pleasures only by their intensity (quantity) but also by their degree of elevation (quality). Some pleasures, in fact, are “better” than others. “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”* This implies the abandonment of pleasure, or “liked experience,” as sole standard; and though the new standard may be hard to define, it cannot be analysed away. The second point to be neglected is that “liked experience” is a blanket term which avoids several difficulties by over-simplification; in particular, it takes no account of the satisfaction many of us experience through doing what we think we “ought” to do and the dissatisfaction caused by not doing it. For many people, “I ought” is not identical with “I want”—even after analysis, the “feel” is different. To lump these various things together under one heading seems to me to extend the term “liked experience” until it becomes almost meaningless and loses all claim to be a clearly-defined scientific notion; it does not allow moral problems to be eliminated, it merely begs them.

I consider that sufficient has been said to show that, while Social Pragmatism may be a theory capable of commanding the assent of that class of people with whose experience it happens to coincide, it has no claim to the allegiance of the rest of us, and cannot compel us to deny the reality of ethics. We are thus left with the same problems as before, together with a strengthened conviction that they cannot be explained away as illusory. It has taken some time to reach this negative conclusion. I hope, however, that the discussion has been worth while; this is a time in which absolutist theories of the values are tending to lose their hold, but there is a danger of our moving to the opposite extreme and concluding that ethics and aesthetics are shams and that their so-called problems are sham problems. Those who come to this conclusion are likely, consciously or unconsciously, to have handed themselves over to some form of dogmatism at least as bad as that they are attacking. This is a regrettable state of affairs:

IV

It is impossible to carry on a discussion of this type without at some time referring to science, which appears to offer us a chance of resolving out uncertainties by a judicious use of scientific method. Science is certainly not without its champions in the field of ethics and aesthetics, and we must examine some of their claims.

**Utilitarianism*, chapter 2.

What relevance might the sciences—and in particular the social sciences—have to problems of conduct? Undoubtedly one of their most useful functions is to improve our knowledge of the circumstances under which we have to act by helping us to understand the workings of society and of the human mind. They can also, to a rather uncertain extent, predict future events; they can tell us, for example, that if present tendencies continue unchecked, they are likely ultimately to give rise to a state of affairs X, but that if we modify them by performing a specific action P, it is probable that state Y will result instead. And they can assist us to understand the significance of X and Y—for example, the economist can say something about the probable economic effects of national bankruptcy, and the psychologist about the likely effect on the individual citizen of prolonged periods of unemployment. All this is very helpful, yet it is not decisive—for two people can be in possession of the same information, and yet not agree on the desirability or otherwise of maintaining a pool of unemployment. Similarly, scientists could provide much information about the atomic bomb and yet were no more competent than anyone else to decide whether or not it would be justifiable to use it. It appears, therefore, that science makes us aware of facts which we use as evidence in the formation of moral judgments, but that opinions as to the precise significance of the evidence vary according to the individual man's estimation of the relative values of various ends. The problem of determining the relationship between the individual and the community, for example, is one which cannot be dealt with in purely scientific terms, for ultimately it is what I should call a moral question. So far, then, our conclusion is that science helps us to resolve our practical problems but that, owing to its very nature, it cannot by itself provide a complete solution.

But it is sometimes maintained that science, and in particular psychology, can replace ethics. Now psychology is of all sciences perhaps the most valuable in the way just described. Can it perhaps assist us still further? It might (perhaps) demonstrate that we are subject to necessity; but that would be of no practical help, for we habitually think we are free and have the sensation of choosing—and that is whence our practical difficulties arise. It is important to avoid the confusion which arises from not realizing that, although psychology attempts to describe and to account for mental processes scientifically, the processes themselves are not scientific. Therefore while psychology can, as we have already pointed out, provide a great deal of valuable information, it can never take the place of ethics. Even apart from this, there would be no reason for

supposing that ethics can be reduced to psychology merely because the formation of the moral consciousness can be accounted for in psychological terms; for firstly, a description of the origins from which a thing sprang is not relevant to an attempt to describe what it now is—for example, men are not identical with the form of life from which they evolved—and secondly, the activity known as “making a choice” remains as baffling as ever for the person who is making it.

But, it may be said, surely his scientific studies enable the psychologist to pronounce on ends as well as on means? Let us consider an actual attempt to maintain this point-of-view; it is contained in a book by Amber Blanco White, entitled **Ethics for Unbelievers*. In this book, we are asked to distinguish carefully between conscience, which originates in the tensions of early childhood, and ideas of good and bad, which are derived from ordinary experience of life. In the course of a discussion of the nature of conscience, the author remarks:

“The good conscience is above all reasonable. It may be, in a particular instance, that conscience is demanding compliance with mistaken standards. We may do well to resist its claim on this account. Or it may be too harsh; when we are entitled, if we can, to appeal to the higher court of reason.”†

It is plain that she is using ethical predicates in two different connections. Firstly, there are the ideas of good and bad which are derived from experience and which she proposes to analyse. Secondly (as in the passages quoted), various ethical terms—“good”, “do well”, “entitled to”—are used with reference to certain standards by which the author judges other people’s consciences and moral ideas. Moral ideals, in other words, having been thrown out of the front door, have crept in unnoticed through the back. And investigation shows that these ideals are not scientific, but are things of which the author happens to approve. (I am not trying to maintain that she is necessarily mistaken, but only to show that one cannot completely eliminate these troublesome and disputable things called moral judgments, however one may alter the form in which they present themselves).

Once again, then, we have drawn a blank, and it begins to seem that there are no certainties to be found. It will perhaps be better if we end our criticisms and try to make some positive suggestions.

**Ethics for Unbelievers*, p. 50.

†*Ibid*, p. 55.

V

Let us begin by examining in some detail an imaginary situation which involves the making of a moral judgment. We may suppose that my friend John is ill in bed, and that I have promised to go and see him this afternoon. It is a wet day, and I feel that I should prefer to be staying at home by the fire. My wife tells me that it would be far better if I did not go. I then have to decide what to do, and some of the first reflections which occur to me are that John will probably be pleased if I come, and that a disappointment may make him feel more ill than he already is. I also remark that I shall not get very wet on the journey since I can go most of the way by bus. My wife then tells me that, owing to a strike, no buses are running, and reminds me that I already have a cold which will probably become worse if I go for a long walk in the rain. These are facts in the situation which had not occurred to me, and it is possible for us to discuss them, assess their relative importance and decide whether it would be better for me to go or to stay at home. But I may also point out that I promised to go and that I think I ought to keep my promise—merely because promises in general ought to be kept. I may be told in reply that circumstances alter cases, and that promises are not so binding as I appear to imagine. We might, if time permitted, be led into a discussion of the merits of promise-keeping; a large part of our discussion would be about facts—for example, about the extent to which social life would be disorganized if promises ceased to be binding. We might in the end discover that, although we agreed about all the facts, we could not agree about the degree of obligation imposed by a promise, and that there seemed to be no means of reaching agreement.

This example illustrates two important points about moral judgments:—

1. They are to some extent determined by knowledge of the facts of the situation—knowledge, that is, both of the circumstances existing at the time and also of what is likely to occur if a certain action is performed. A rational discussion can take place about these matters, and moral judgments may be revised as new facts are pointed out or ones already known are further elucidated.
2. They are partly dependent on attitude. Two people can agree on the facts of a situation and yet make different moral judgments which no amount of discussion will reconcile. This occurs when they attribute different significance to the same facts. (Of course, it need not happen, for attitudes can often be changed by deeper knowledge of the facts.)

Evidently the peculiar difficulties which arise when one attempts to resolve the moral (or aesthetic) problems, and which make it impossible for science to provide a complete solution, are closely connected with differences in attitude.

We may regard the facts of the situation as pieces of evidence upon which the final decision is to be based. Now the scientist also works upon evidence, but he generally has the advantage of knowing that his evidence can be correctly construed in one way only, and that it is possible, at least in principle, for that way to be discovered. In the sphere of morals, no such assurance is possible, different people interpret the same evidence in the light of different attitudes—i.e. of different principles—and there is no way of showing that one set of principles is more correct than another. If all the facts are elucidated, if discussion is pushed to the limit, and disagreement still persists, there is nothing more to be done and no court to which to appeal. The psychologist may be able to suggest why a certain person entertains certain principles, but it does not by any means follow that this will resolve the disagreement; and in any case, the psychologist is himself as other men are, having his own attitudes and principles.

The picture just given may seem exaggerated, yet I believe it to be substantially correct. It is, of course, true that moral decisions—even if they are recognized as such—do not always necessitate long discussions, with others or with oneself, in the way described. But that, I think, is because most of us are habitually guided by certain principles, or attitudes, upon which we act with little or no reflection. They may at some time have been analyzed, or perhaps have been adopted only after long reflection. Frequently, however, they are accepted on authority without investigation, or are developed unconsciously, so that it is only after long self-examination that one realizes what beliefs are implicit in one's actions—a realization which can sometimes be most disturbing. But if we were asked to justify one of our decisions or judgments, it is probable that the resulting explanations would be along the lines I have indicated, though sometimes the facts would be made subordinate to the attitudes. This, I think, shows that a purely rationalist system of ethics must be inadequate. It is all very well to say: "We must therefore stick to facts, and to arguments based upon facts and in accordance with the weight of the evidence."* I agree; the more we can do that, the better.†

**Ethics for Unbelievers*, p. 146.

†It must not be thought that I am recommending irrationalism—just the contrary; I think that we should strive after objectivity and a scrupulous regard for the facts, even though the goal may be unattainable.

But it is not, and cannot be, a complete solution, for people will not agree about the weight of the evidence unless their attitudes happen to be similar; and attitudes, as we have seen, are determined to a large extent by factors which are not rational.

VI

Finally, I wish to consider what effect these conclusions might have upon our general attitude towards ethics. I have tried *inter alia* to show, firstly, that in ethical matters it is impossible to achieve logical certainty, and secondly, that ethics is not concerned with values, if by that term is meant certain super-sensible, non-natural archetypes which are to some extent reflected in the ethical and aesthetic qualities inhering in certain persons, actions and things. These conclusions are not startling—we are all aware that empirical knowledge is not certain*—but they sometimes prove rather disconcerting, since many of us nevertheless persist (perhaps unconsciously) in regarding “right” or “good” as in some sense absolute. Thus someone might well say: “Yes, I will agree with your arguments about epistemology; but do you think it would *really* be right to do X?” The use of the word “really” shows that it would not be sufficient for me to say: “The results of your doing X will be p, q and r, which you have said you consider good; so evidently it *would* be right to do X.” This reply might elicit the comment: “Yes, I know all that. What I am asking is, would it *really* be right?” To such a question I can give no answer, for it is a pointless one. I might demonstrate this by asking my questioner what it would be like to be convinced that X is *really* right, for if he did agree with my epistemological arguments, he would be unable to give a coherent reply.

Throughout this discussion of the nature of ethics, we have been trying to decide what we have in mind when we say that X is right; having decided, we must be faithful to our conclusion by refraining from asking questions which it renders self-contradictory. To ask, “Is X *really* right?” is like saying, “I appreciate all the evidence you have brought forward showing that light travels at 186,000 miles per second, but does it *really*?” To such a question there can be no answer (provided that both persons are using words in the same sense). Indeed, the questioner is not asking to be given grounds for rational conviction (he has them already), but hopes to be patted

*“Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sensation, but likewise in philosophy. . . . When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my own feeling concerning the superiority of their influence.” Hume, *Treatise*, p. 103 (O.U.P. edition).

on the head and given an emotional assurance that light behaves in the way it appears to.

All I have done in this article, therefore, is to try to put ethics on the same level as other subjects of human mental activity. It has its own special characteristics, but our thought about ethics is not different in kind from our thought about other matters (except, of course, logic and mathematics, which are concerned with tautologous propositions); in particular, it does not give rise to a particularly elevated or spiritual type of knowledge. Some people, as we have suggested, tend to fall into the position of generally accepting the epistemological theory I have outlined, while at the same time feeling that there *are* values which they are yet philosophically convinced they cannot be acquainted with. The result is pessimism and the conviction that, owing to our mental limitations, one thing is bound to appear as good—and as pointless—as another. This hopeless pessimism is unjustified, and it should not be incapable of remedy. Bishop Butler said: "Everything is what it is, and not another thing." The pessimists need to realize this; their epistemological conclusions are what they are and, if they remember this and act accordingly by applying them consistently, they can find a remedy for their pessimism. There can be no doubt that a remedy is needed, for the world to-day is seriously troubled by the disorder caused by pessimism and uncertainty.

This whole discussion seems to me to confirm that things are what we make them. In deciding what is good and what ought to be done, we need not be trammelled and restricted by dogmas, but can strike out independently and try to fashion a future which shall be better than the present. Morality is not given but made, and our task must be to put forth all our creative abilities. This conclusion is somewhat abstract, since it lacks definite content—but it is essential to find out where one is and in what directions one can go before setting off on a journey which is to be more than a blind and purposeless saunter. Epistemology can, as it were, take us to the top of a hill and show us the shape of the countryside, and thereby afford us guidance on our journey. Let us set out with courage and in good heart.

PATRICK BENNER

REVIEW ARTICLES

THE CRISIS IN THE UNIVERSITY

SIR WALTER MOBERLY'S recent book *The Crisis in the University* was reviewed by Mr. Blackham in the July number of *The Plain View*. Coming from one who has spent his life as teacher and administrator in British universities and finally for a substantial period as Chairman of the Universities Grants Committee, the book has claims to the most careful attention of all who are concerned with or about the work of our universities. Its intrinsic interest not only justifies such claims but has in fact substantiated them, for it has given rise to a more intense and worthwhile discussion in university circles than any of its predecessors, unless it be Newman's *Idea of a University*. It has received thoughtful and, in a number of cases, valuable treatment in most of the solidier magazines, and in particular has evoked an important article from Professor Michael Oakeshott in the *Cambridge Journal*, and a symposium of articles by university teachers of eminence in the autumn number of the *Universities Quarterly*. Its title was taken as the subject for the opening session of the annual conference of the British Universities in December, 1949, and the later sessions were occupied with discussions of two of the individual topics which are dealt with at some length by Sir Walter, viz. General Education and Technological Institutes.

The main thesis of Sir Walter's book is that there is a moral or spiritual crisis in the universities, because they "lack any clear agreed sense of direction or purpose"; because "they share and have shown small signs of transcending the spiritual confusion of the age". It is therefore obviously of vital importance to all who are concerned with the problem of ethics, and this may justify some further consideration of its argument in the pages of *The Plain View*.

Sir Walter Moberly's thesis has not received a clear, or indeed a general endorsement from the writers to whom I have referred. The view they mostly take is that there is no special crisis of the kind described in the universities at all. Sir Walter indeed says in his opening paragraph that "the crisis in the University reflects the crisis in the world". Since they are in the world the universities naturally are involved in this crisis if crisis it be. Mr. Lionel Elvin (in the *Universities Quarterly*) probably reflects the general opinion in the universities when he doubts whether the world as a whole is in a crisis so much as in a period of "unusual difficulty", and when he asserts that Sir Walter Moberly is quite wrong when he goes on to claim that the university is in a crisis "in a quite exceptional way".

The truth is that the book is the outcome of discussions among a number of Christian university teachers held under the ægis of the Student Christian Movement and the Christian Frontier Council. What they were concerned with is the disappearance of religion from the universities, as indeed from the general life of the community, and their discussions took place against this background, and were inevitably coloured by this preoccupation; it has become common form that technical advance has outstripped moral progress, and this is often attributed to the decay in religion; from this all our ills are therefore to be derived. Although Sir Walter Moberly is in a sense acting as their rapporteur the book bears the imprint of his own sincerity, his own open-mindedness, and his own faith. He realises that in something like half a century the universities have ceased to be predominantly Christian. This worries him very much, not only because he is naturally concerned at the weakening of a faith which he deems essential to the world's salvation, but because the result has been that the universities have ceased to concern themselves with these fundamental problems; with the result that they cannot possibly supply that leadership without which the world is drifting like a rudderless skiff swept out to sea by strong tides.

He chides his late colleagues in the universities for being so much occupied with their specialisms that they are unable to look round and grasp the overall situation, let alone take any steps to tackle the problems which are involved. He more particularly chides his Christian friends for their failure to bring religion back into the central focus of university life, and to produce the leadership which could effect this.

I think that there is a good deal of truth in this diagnosis. In the formal sense of the term there is not much religion left in the universities. The trouble is that Sir Walter Moberly and those for whom he speaks are not really in a position to cope with the problem. It is just because religion has become so chained to dogmatic Christianity that it has been beaten out of the universities, and is in full retreat, apart from temporary periods of superstitious emotionalism which seem to be the inevitable concomitant of war in the world outside the universities.

A whole generation has now grown up in the atmosphere created by an earlier generation of great scientific thinkers, and although its own capacity for rational scientific thinking is only as yet rudimentary it has long passed the stage when it was prepared to take on trust, that is accept as a matter of faith, most of the main dogmas of the Christian Church. How can one expect the

ordinary undergraduate with his present-day background and scientific knowledge to accept religion when he sees that the largest organised body of Christians is committed to such doctrines as the sinfulness of divorce, and of the use of contraceptives, especially when he reads in the papers that nearly half its adherents go to birth control clinics for advice! This of course affects only social policy, but policy on which human happiness and future prospects depend. But then all the Christian Churches accept theological doctrines such as those of eternal punishment, of resurrection of the body, of original sin, and all sorts of other dogmas which appear to the modern undergraduate as either ludicrous or repulsive.

It is of course quite true that a number of men of great eminence in the community still adhere to orthodox religion, but with most of those whom the modern undergraduate can most respect, the faith appears, as with Sir Stafford Cripps, to be a purely ethical one devoid of dogmatic content, or, as with the Bishop of Birmingham, the dogma has been watered down until it is difficult to see what there is left in it for belief. This might well appear to him as leaving a reasonably clear site for reconstruction, but he is not encouraged to occupy it, for the still formidable army of the orthodox continuously rake it with heavy salvos fired from their respective defensive works.

The result is that unless he is obsessed with the need to escape from the realities of life, in which case he will probably take refuge in the Roman fold, or is driven by religious emotion to join himself to some existing group, the modern undergraduate is left in the air.

The latter I regard as an important, if not a large section. Religious emotion is too closely woven into the psychic make-up of humanity, as Jung has shown, to be as easily exorcised as nineteenth century rationalists, and many of their twentieth century descendants, believed to be probable. And even if it were possible I do not believe it would be desirable that this should happen, for religion, and I am using the term with a very wide and non-supernatural meaning, seems to me to provide the only force which can carry humanity through its manifold difficulties at any rate to a stage where life can be a fair and goodly thing for all people.

Be this as it may, the decline of orthodox religion has had the effect, and this is particularly noticeable in universities, of turning emotion in false directions, or of damming it up and depriving it, at any rate temporarily, of all effectiveness. The principal false direction which it has been taking of recent years is that of Communism. Marxism which provides a valuable method of social

analysis and furnishes tests of social progress which, used with discrimination, can be most helpful, has in addition some of the essentials of a religion. It is not therefore surprising that with the complete incapacity of orthodox religion to adjust itself to modern knowledge, Marxian Communism should win to its ranks large numbers of passionate young men and women. It has become, especially with the defeat of Fascism, which in any case had no intellectual framework, the most obvious rival of the Christian churches.

It is, however, much too narrowly based on nineteenth century knowledge and preconceptions, and in its Russian form at any rate—and this is at present everywhere dominant—it is altogether too authoritarian to have any chance of becoming dominant, or possibly even of surviving, in any society where freedom of discussion and of experimentation are effectively maintained.

Sir Walter Moberly, like most religious people, is much more afraid of Communism than there is any need to be. In one passage he even reaches the position of advocating "tests for teachers" which appear to be aimed at Communists, but other passages seem to contradict this suggestion. He is much less worried by atheism, and this after all is not surprising, since atheism by itself is altogether too negative to become a religion.

The dammed up religious feeling to which I have referred, is apt to flow over into nationalism, especially at times when international politics are exacerbated. Nationalism provides quite a number of the essentials of religion which are found in Communism, and others which are even more important. It is, therefore, as Reinhold Niebuhr, a more profound thinker than Sir Walter Moberly, has noticed, a much more real and pervasive danger than Communism.

However, the fact remains that but little is being done in the universities to thrash out these problems, at any rate in the education of students, or to assist students to build up a religion or a philosophy which will enable them in their adult life to grapple with the perils of false doctrine, and, what is perhaps even more important, to start their own children, or pupils, for large numbers of them will become teachers, on the right road. What, if anything, is to be done about it? To this, which is the fundamental question of his book, Sir Walter Moberly has no clear answer, indeed one is left in doubt whether he has any answer at all.

It is certain that he thinks that something ought to be done, and on this I entirely agree with him. There is an argument against this which holds that such matters are best excluded from the

formal work of the universities, and should be left to the students to manage for themselves through the apparatus of their own societies.

Mr. Elvin appears to accept this view, and he is undoubtedly right when he emphasises that the notice boards of students' societies in all universities give ample evidence of keen interest in "the fundamental questions". Moreover the discussions, led as they often are by the keener teachers, are frequently of great value and for a proportion of students have a lasting educational effect. Among these organizations, Ethical and Rationalist Societies are becoming increasingly prominent, a fact which I think is one of the most promising elements in the situation. Nevertheless I do not think that we should be content with such a hit or miss method of handling "the fundamental questions". At the best a few students may be stimulated to make more thorough studies of these problems. For the majority the papers and discussions will afford only a temporary stimulation. Surely all educational experience teaches that this kind of temporary work has little long-term value—for example, the work of the Workers' Educational Association, with its emphasis on the three years' tutorial class is founded upon the validity of this thesis, which can hardly require any elaborate argumentation at this stage.

Even so it is only a minority of students who are attracted into these societies, and obtain even the temporary stimulation of these discussions. And this is particularly so in Redbrick, where so many students living at long distances are apt to "clock in" at the university like hands at a factory.

Can anything more effective be done? Sir Walter recognises that a return to the old orthodox religious university is impossible, and despite the fact that Roman Catholics struggle to maintain such institutions and Communists hope eventually to secure them, the mass of university opinion will undoubtedly support him. But he does not find any satisfactory alternative, and his practical suggestions come to little more than that theological faculties, which must remain Christian, should extend their influence more widely into the universities, and that Christian dons should get together and co-operate more actively in pushing their views. Nothing could, I think, more clearly bring out the essential bankruptcy of Sir Walter's position than the jejeune character of his practical proposals.

The promotion of a more general type of curriculum in the universities, a matter which has been receiving very much attention of recent years, seems to me to afford the most likely line

of attack on this problem. In the great Harvard Report on *General Education in a Free Society*, provision is made for inclusion of studies which should bring the undergraduate right up against "the fundamental problems". Sir Walter Moberly shows that he is keenly in sympathy with this movement which he refers to in more than one chapter of his book, and indeed mentions some of the difficulties which confront it. He nowhere, however, seems to relate it very specifically to his own major problem.

This is possibly because the somewhat empirical results which it would give could hardly satisfy his demand for some clear and integrated purpose in the ideological teaching at the universities. It is only teachers who, like Christians or Communists, are so absolutely certain that they are right that they are prepared to burn their boats, to whom this idea of integrated purposiveness appeals. The discussions of *The Crisis in the University* in the *Universities Quarterly* and elsewhere show clearly that most university teachers regard this policy as in the highest degree dangerous. This does not mean that they lack a faith of their own, but that they realise that the faith must not be dogmatically held; it must be provisional and held subject to readiness for revision. Humanity must advance, not like a Macedonian wedge, but on the broadest of broad fronts so that what appear the most promising lines of attack to-day may readily be abandoned to-morrow in favour of others which to-day seem hardly worth trying.

All that could be done by bringing into degree courses some such subjects as philosophy, ethics and religion would be to bring students into contact with the main lines of thought on these subjects, to stimulate them to think out a view of life for themselves, and to leave them with a sufficient indication of the material to continue systematic reading and building up after they have left the university. The purpose at first sight may therefore appear almost as slender as that put forward by Sir Walter Moberly himself. Nevertheless I think it is more promising. We shall be told, as indeed we have already been, for example by Mr. A. E. Teale in his interesting contribution to the symposium in the *Universities Quarterly*, that the intellectual approach is of little value since problems of religion and ethics can only be solved in real life, not in the study. This view has sufficient truth in it to give it a specious air of validity. But it is now generally agreed that doctors or lawyers, who are certainly men who occupy themselves with the problems of real life, are more likely to be competent in their work if they have been grounded in the principles of their profession in university schools, though it is true that, among lawyers at any rate, there

are still in the deep country those who hold that all such studies are no better than a waste of time. Even so, life in the universities is by no means such a cloistered and unreal affair that there are no opportunities of testing moral judgment by practice in use, or making value appreciations. Such judgments or appreciations may indeed travel with the student through life, which makes it particularly important that they should be arrived at in the light of knowledge and discussion.

In spite of the reconstruction policy of the Association of University Teachers, much advocacy by eminent educationists such as Sir Richard Livingstone, and important experimental work in the U.S.A., the policy of more general and less specialist education is making slow headway in English universities. It has indeed come at an unpropitious time when so much emphasis is being placed on scientific and technological training. Even more of an obstacle is the resistance of the mass of university teachers who, while agreeing with the proposals in theory, are subconsciously ill-conditioned to putting them into effect, since they are apt to be wedded to their own specialisms. Sir Walter Moberly very pertinently remarks that "dons will not make big sacrifices, they will not, for instance, make radical reductions in the specialist demands of honours schools for which they are responsible, in order to leave more room for a culture of which, sometimes, they are themselves devoid".

I am not accordingly very optimistic about the general adoption in our universities of any course of the kind which I am advocating, in the near future, but if one or two institutions could be induced to experiment, a leaven would be introduced into the mass which would, I think, eventually permeate the whole.

Sir Walter Moberly deals with a number of other matters which are of great importance and interest to the universities, and does so for the most part in relation to the central topic which I have selected for discussion in this article. They are, however, too specialised to be likely to interest the majority of the readers of *The Plain View* and I do not accordingly propose to say anything further about them here.

CHORLEY

THE ROMANTIC IDEAL IN MARRIAGE

THE GRAMMAR OF MARRIAGE: Physical Relations by Philip M. Bloom; Psychological Adjustments by Clifford Allen; Ethical Implications by H. J. Blackham. Pp. 36. The Ethical Union, Ninepence.

THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP. The Report of a Commission appointed by direction of London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friend (Quakers). Pp. 27. Friends Book Centre, Ninepence.

The admirable Quaker pamphlet gives a fine and balanced presentation of the true nature of marriage. It would be even more effective and strike home with greater force if it faced more fully all that is involved in dispelling romantic illusion, which it identifies with the more vulgar notions of popular novels and films. Of the physical relationship it says: "to the husband and wife who look on their sexual relationships as an expression in terms of the body of their deep union of heart and mind it will remain one of the greatest joys and richest experiences which marriage can provide". This is highly optimistic and profoundly romantic. The truth surely is that only within the context of romantic love does the joyful mutual giving and receiving of two persons express itself naturally through sex and raise sex communion to the level of a great and rich joy. Only then are body and soul fused in sexual love so that body expresses soul. No amount of mutual affection and commitment, no amount of technical care and accomplishment can perform this miracle and it is exactly the higher potentialities of sexual experience which must be relinquished in most monogamous marriages.

This is often because people have married when drawn together by feelings quite inadequate to carry them through the sexual act in a way or at a level which can bring them any real joy. Loyalty and affection are often the cause of this. The question is how far such people can be helped psychologically or technically to create any kind of sexual intercourse which will bring them any satisfaction and help them to make a more fulfilling common life as well as happily to bear children. But it may also be because people who had the initial emotional impulse on marriage yet ran into technical difficulties in carrying through the physical fulfilment and never recovered a wholeness of emotional and physical unity.

It should be possible, by spreading a confident yet realistic approach to sexual consummation, to help young people to wait for adequate emotions and to fulfil and develop and live out such emotion as has drawn them into marriage. There remains still the danger that only later will they meet with a more complete and

intense experience as well as the possibility that, romantic emotion being in itself a phase, a new encounter may severely strain an established marriage. It is surely essential to admit that only in the context of complete romantic emotion is sexual experience transfigured so that it becomes a great joy. Hypocrisy creeps in if one pretends one can let go the romantic ideal and yet promise people a great and rich sexual experience. It is little good *thinking* of it as giving bodily expression to a union of heart and mind if in fact sexual intercourse is only a limited and not very significant experience. The work-a-day union of shared responsibility and mutual care, companionship, trust, and fidelity may well frame and include harmless sexual intercourse, but such feelings do not transfigure it as romantic emotion does. They can humanize it and help to remove brutality, anxiety, and shrinking. With technical help and patience some satisfaction of instinct and some pleasure, but often a somewhat sorrowful pleasure, may be achieved. The sorrow lies in the inevitable frustration of the romantic possibility if that has been glimpsed or remotely apprehended, and if mere sensual experience is not highly valued.

This, I am sure, is the truth of most "good" marriages between generous, faithful, sensitive, and intelligent people. The truth should be faced. It does not undermine marriage; it simply recognizes what possibilities must be relinquished in all but the rare marriages which are consummated at the right moment between two people who are really wholly, passionately, and freely in love—without inhibition and with unforced unity of soul and body. Perhaps right education and preparation might increase the number of marriages which are the fulfilment of such love. For the rest, the romantic ideal should be bravely acknowledged and bravely relinquished. There should be no hypocrisy about pretending the lesser is the best or that the best is only a shoddy illusion. Nearly all that is written about marriage from a Christian point of view suffers from this hypocrisy or spiritual blindness which belittles the romantic experience and pretends that a shared life of Christian domesticity and public responsibility can make of sexual intercourse a very valuable experience.

The arguments in favour of stable marriage are overwhelming without this. The higher potentialities of sex must frequently be frustrated as well as the lower on behalf of fidelity, stability, and the care of children. There is a deep personal need for fidelity and stability as well as a social need, but one should recognise what sacrifice may be involved or the romantic rebel will feel the moralist is spiritually blind.

The pamphlet issued by the Ethical Union gives more detailed and developed advice than the Quaker pamphlet on the physical relation and psychological adjustments involved in marriage; the first is dealt with by a gynæcologist, the second by a psychiatrist, and the ethical implications of marriage are dealt with by the secretary of the Ethical Union. It is clear that the third writer is not quite happy about the impression created by the first. All those who know most about it are agreed that it is very largely the physical relation which wrecks or strains marriages and leaves one or both of the parties frustrated, strained, and frequently antagonistic. There is, therefore, a widespread movement to help people with technical advice. But there are various difficulties in this undertaking. One is that the most well intentioned writings may have the same effect as the least well intentioned pornographic ones upon those who are not in a state of mind to receive them, thus aggravating the ambivalence of this strange, almost inconceivable, and attractively horrifying unknown thing. So far as scientific detachment really avoids this, there will be a forced detachment in the inexperienced mind which cannot assimilate these cold facts. It seems doubtful how far anyone can be helped in such a way except at the right time by the right person in private.

A second difficulty is more subtle, and it is this which seems to be felt by Mr. Blackham. As soon as one isolates the physical details for attention and stresses the possibility of finding great satisfaction by becoming expert in these details and the danger of serious frustration through inexperience, one is in danger of encouraging a crude cult of sensuality. Here again a certain hypocrisy seems to creep in, if it is not sheer lack of discrimination. Too much is claimed for sensual satisfaction such as can be achieved by technique. One wonders how all this fits in with the emotions which alone could transfigure this pursuit of sensual satisfaction. It seems to call forth the reactions of the puritan and the romantic, who insist from different points of view that, after all, sensual pleasure through sexual play should not be looked on as too important.

The third writer has the courageous originality to go against the present trend and maintain that the burden of sexual frustration may be light and harmless as well as intolerable and harmful, and that the difference is not only a difference between persons but between attitudes and ways of management. He deals originally and forcefully with the need for a proper contractual basis for married life, with the creative and forward-moving nature of true fidelity which can absorb and transcend all manner of new experi-

ences, and with the multiplicity of possible kinds of fulfilment in marriage. He challenges the critics of monogamous marriage to put forward a better practicable alternative and denies them the right to revolt on the ground of the sacrifices involved unless they can do so.

There is much simple wisdom in the second article and it could do nothing but good to any young people reading it.

VIRGINIA FLEMMING

THE TRADITION OF HUMANISM

(Professor Oliffe Richmond published in 1944 a long philosophical poem with a humanist content, *Challenge to Faith*. These lines compose a section taken from a companion poem to be published shortly.)

I have not plumbed philosophies; I preferred
To live philosopher and to find my way
Unencumbered with vast paraphernalia
Of learning, reference-tomes and dictionaries
For hair-splitting in sesquipedalian words,
Teutonic amalgam, Graeco-Latin alloy
Beyond my Latin or Greek to comprehend.
Between science and life I strike a balance,
Content to be, but curious of my being,
And when I die, shall die, rather than reach
Thermodynamical equilibrium.

I travel light, no slave to the ordnance map,
But, having an eye for country, use the eye
To cross the stiles and pick my right of way:
Yet let the map correct me, if I am lost,—
Though out of date, still wistfully marking Inn
Where now is gin-palace or caravanserai
(Gone up in the world, down in my estimation).
Road-omnibus for all is not for me,
Conducted tour anathema, guide taboo.

But now, having found a way, could I be guide
Back through the mazes of my hedgerow ramble,
That friends might catch the glimpses and the views
That paid me for the tramp? Imagine it not.
The lights are different now: the brilliant cloud,

The rainbow on the cornfield, the clean wind
Fluttering the poplars, the russet-smiling girl
Half-hid in the apple-boughs—a tree-spirit
Wound in the leaf-shade—all the remembered moments
Irrevocably are gone. I lived them once;
And you, my friends, will travel another path
Found for yourselves: for there lies your happiness.
May it be beautiful for you, bestir
Your fancy, bring discovery's recompense.

Some day let us compare experiences,
Contrast adventures—and assess results.
Were you as happy as I? Can each from other
Learn where he missed a turning that would lead
To a last delectable vision and the end
Of travel?

Or is there, while we live, no end?

OLIFFE RICHMOND

BOOK REVIEWS

CITIES IN EVOLUTION. By Patrick Geddes. New and Revised Edition. Edited by The Outlook Tower Association and the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction. pp. xxxi + 233 incl. 32 pp. of illustrations. Williams & Norgate, 18s.

Patrick Geddes hurtles into our time with all the moral impetus of one of the 19th century prophets. He is, not unconsciously, of the line of Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris; but he is not an anachronism, he is the answer to their call. They were romantics who in their rage of rejection looked backwards to better times. With Geddes there is a profound and joyful acceptance of industrial society, married to an historical imagination which surges forward, an empirical idealism which sees, not at first sight, the possibilities, the way of regeneration and achievement. The industrial city is a creeping blot, an interminable conurbation, but the city is the greatest work of man, the concrete synthesis, the focus of all contemporary activities and interests, and with all this the conscious union of past, present, and to come, the embodiment of tradition, the partnership of the generations of which Burke speaks. The sterility of science and of art in their isolation of analysis and personal preoccupation is cured by their union in civic enterprise. This is the true humanism, and Geddes, like Brunelleschi, digs up

the past, travelling incessantly, poking about, informing his observant eye with a battery of lights in focus generated by his many-sided intensely living interests. The town and country planning movement which he did so much to inspire and direct is a new renaissance which ought ultimately to prove of greater historical significance than the admired triumphs of the Italians. This is a reprint of the only systematic exposition of his ideas that Geddes published, long out of print, and now issued with the addition of new material, including an illustrated section from Geddes' famous Cities Exhibition, and the omission of a good deal of the old material which is not so relevant to-day. Thus the book is far more than a reprint: it is both a source book and a memorial. It allows Geddes to speak for himself spaciouly and at ease in the intractably oral overflowing way which was himself, and it communicates something of the personal impact of the man which outside great literature is more vital in life than in books. Lewis Mumford has carried further, and with a more precise grasp of our actual problems, the development and dissemination of this stream of ideas, but the impulse springs from this man, this pioneer of regional surveys and civic exhibitions who was about, and knew that he was about, business bigger than big business, policies more historical than politics, procedures more democratic than elections, a synthesis more universal than philosophy. He was aware of the abstraction and futility and consequent discouragement and cynicism that devastates modern life, and nevertheless believed that it was a passing phase, that the symptoms would soon disappear with the unmistakable health of the new age now being prepared by the new enlightenment and the new enthusiasm. To-day this might look like the optimism of forty years ago, to be treated with disillusioned contempt. It is not. In these years the approach and method of Geddes have prevailed in the planning movement, and that is a great thing, but it is small compared with the total social transformation which is going on answerable to his faith. The dangers which threaten the new orientation are of course immense, but for those who care for the things for which he cared, and have eyes to see, there is more reason for faith and hope than when he lived.

CHALLENGE OF CONSCIENCE: the story of the Conscientious Objectors of 1939-1949. By Dennis Hayes. pp. 406. Allen and Unwin, 15s.

This book should attract several kinds of reader—those who are interested in legal questions concerning civil liberty, those who are

interested either as supporters or as opponents in the fortunes of the pacifist movement, those who are interested as students of psychology in the astonishingly diverse ways in which human consciences work. In World War I there were some 19,000 British conscientious objectors, in World War II some 60,000: this increase alone suggests that the matter merits attention.

The author, a young lawyer who was himself in prison for some time during the recent war, has developed in great detail the legal aspects of his subject—the coming of conscription, the introduction into the National Service Act of sections providing for conscientious objection, the setting-up of local and appellate tribunals. The types of applicant with whom these tribunals had to deal are illustrated and their methods in dealing with them. In a few cases unconditional exemption was granted, in the majority some kind of condition was attached; others were directed into the Non-Combatant Corps of the Army; about 1,000 (including those who became objectors while in the forces) could not get their sincerity recognized and were court-martialled, a few of them several times. The prison experiences of one or two of these are described briefly. It may be said about the working of this scheme in general that there was far less cruelty than occurred during 1914 to 1918, in particular less of the “cat-and-mouse” treatment of which very few people in this country had approved; but it was disturbing to notice how frequently educated objectors who could express their views clearly under tribunal conditions were more generously treated than the less well-educated who could not.

The next sections of the book describe some of the forms of alternative service which were undertaken by objectors. Glimpses are given of the work of the Friends’ Ambulance Unit and the Friends’ Relief Service in various parts of the world, and of Pacifist Service Units among problem families in some of Britain’s large cities. These are followed by some account of the experiences of objectors who agreed, and were allowed, to work in the Fire Service, in other Civil Defence services and in the Non-Combatant Corps. There were some 50,000 civil prosecutions for various offences against civil defence regulations which were claimed to have been committed on grounds of conscience. Mr. Hayes tells in his last few chapters how conscription in industry, conscription of women, and the release of conscientious objectors from their conditions of exemption, worked.

An able foreword is contributed by Fenner Brockway, who had suffered a long term of imprisonment as a political objector in the 1914-18 war. During the recent war he was chairman of the Central

Board for Conscientious Objectors, and in his foreword he claims that objectors have at least performed a valuable service in "getting it recognized that the final judgment on participation in any war should be made not by the State but by the individual."

There is no immediate prospect that groups of men will refrain indefinitely from trying at intervals to settle their disputes by war. Nor is there any prospect that when this happens there will be no members of the groups who will refuse on religious, moral or political grounds to take part. The problem of conscientious objection, therefore, though it may be in comparative abeyance at the moment, is sure to appear again, perhaps on a larger scale than in the past. Complete equality of sacrifice is, of course, an impossible if not a meaningless ideal; but every effort should be made to spread the broad-mindedness which enabled numerous citizens of widely differing views, even in war-time, to respect the sincerity and devotion of others whose immediate aims conflicted with their own; and it should not be forgotten that such genuine tolerance is more difficult to achieve for those who share majority opinions than for those who hold unpopular ones. Considerable advance toward such mutual tolerance was made in Britain during World War II, but there is a long way to go before it can be felt that any satisfactory state has been reached either of climate of opinion or of legal machinery.

F. C. ADE

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. By Sir Arthur Keith. pp. 721 and illustrations. Watts, 25s.

Sir Arthur Keith, writing his account of his life with the aid of journals, has a much firmer basis of fact than those autobiographers who rely on their memories, so much recollection of our younger days being fantasy. The drawback of this reliance on journals, and this work suffers from it, is that too much matter and too many characters are brought to light for the unity of a single volume. The novelist dilutes his experience through a dozen or score of volumes. The professional man has the disadvantage too, from the point of view of writing a fluent story, of being able to trace up all his colleague's careers with the aid of a professional directory, whereas characters simply pass into oblivion in the consciousness of the man not so assisted. Despite its being over-peopled this book is very readable. Much that is left to the reader to guess and speculate about in many an autobiography, is revealed by the author; finance is a case in point. There are no hazy remarks about living in a garret, one follows Keith about Bloomsbury from

lodging house to lodging house, and one finds out whether the £2 per week rent, or whatever the figure may be, did or did not include breakfast and cleaning. One also finds out what sort of people these were who let rooms.

Keith's story, although that of a man with unusual abilities directed to unusual ends, is typically Scots. The son of a working farmer in far from well-off circumstances, he was one of a large family, some of whom went like himself to the nearby Aberdeen University and became professional men, and others farmed or went goldmining, mostly abroad. Keith we find going to Siam after graduation, in order to collect together enough savings to allow him to continue his studies to obtain the M.D. and F.R.C.S. degrees, which he did according to plan. Of interest is his account of his type of thinking which was visual. Certain subjects, languages being one, Keith had great difficulty in coping with. The circumstance of a man so undeniably brilliant as is Sir Arthur Keith finding difficulty in attaining standards demanded of an entrant to a university makes one question their validity. Do not educational bodies want the single model man whereas nature provides differing types of not inferior value?

On religious matters, Sir Arthur Keith while uncompromising in his own rejection of theism is unusually tolerant and charitable towards those who do not, in this resembling his friend, the late C. A. Watts. This tolerance is admirable, but surely he is confused when in writing on an incident at a meeting of the British Association when he delivered the presidential address with atheistic implications which naturally conflicted with the sentiments of the Bishop of Ripon, who preached a service on the Sunday, he says that both were seeking the truth in their own way. Surely it is salvation that the theist is after, not merely cold and shabby truth? If scientist and salvation religionist were pursuing the same end there would be no accounting for the scale of the divergence reached.

Keith quotes a passage from his diary in which, reviewing some of his activities, he says that there was no wonder that he had been called a careerist. Such frankness is disarming and will do much to make his books palatable to critics of his unorthodox views on religion and somewhat rightwing standpoint on social issues.

M. L. BURNET

LOGIC AND THE BASIS OF ETHICS. By Arthur N. Prior. pp. iii. Clarendon Press, 8s. 6d.

The Ethical Movement was founded at the end of the last century upon the autonomy of ethics, a principle derived from Kant by its

American founder, Felix Adler. The argument for the autonomy of ethics was, however, stated with greater subtlety and lucidity by the English philosopher Henry Sidgwick, who was the moving spirit in the Ethical Society established at Cambridge and whose addresses to Ethical Societies, developing some of his most characteristic views, were published in his *Practical Ethics*. Since that time the views of naturalists and metaphysicians have prevailed, with the result that ethics as such has dropped right out. Mr. Prior does not say that this has happened, but it is the effect of his closely reasoned and historical analysis to show that ethics can only exist in its own right. Naturalists can argue that there is no ultimate obligation, but not that there both is an ultimate obligation and that it can be logically derived from demonstrable facts. That is, they must either quit the ethical camp or quit naturalism and accept Professor Moore's argument that "good is indefinable." Similarly, the ethical rationalist can argue that the mind can recognize moral obligations, but not that moral obligations are logically demonstrable (cases of logical constraint), nor that they are defined by the will of God, or by their beneficial consequences: an obligation only follows from what is itself an obligation. Mr. Prior revives for us the controversies in which each partisan defends his position by unwittingly taking advantage of the strength of his opponent's position, with the result that when he is discovered there he is of all men most vulnerable. On the other hand, if one has the satisfaction of reducing one's opponent's case to palpable self-contradiction it is necessarily accompanied by the more dubious satisfaction of admitting that one's own case is a truism. (Really, of course, so far from being a flat conclusion to the debate, this is the ideal goal of controversy.)

If the mistakes Mr. Prior has followed through can be avoided in future discussions, that will be an immense gain in this troublesome field. A more careful formulation of the alternative positions and a deeper appreciation of the strength of each is the indispensable step in moving towards a possible reconciliation that is not a mere revival of past confusions. But ethics, Mr. Prior would admit, is not merely nor mainly theoretical discussion, and in leaving out the big issues of knowledge and policy which occupy every age one leaves out the decisive factors in ethics. Nevertheless, logical criticism is an indispensable service and Mr. Prior's performance of it is exemplary.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA ENSLAVED. The story of the Communist coup d'état, by Hubert Ripka. pp. 332. Gollancz, 18s.

A great deal of misunderstanding of the nature of Czecho-

slovakia's enslavement is at present current, misunderstanding which does the Czech people untold harm. It is being felt by some that the Czechs are a weak people who, having failed to fight against the Germans after the Great Powers had betrayed them, failed also to take a stronger line to avoid the coup d'état of February, 1948. *Czechoslovakia Enslaved* is to be welcomed in that it is a factual account, indeed, an historical document, by a responsible Czech Minister of the events which led up to the Communists' seizing control, and also in that it brings home very forcibly that to maintain democracy each one of us must try to improve the political education of the masses. Because the Czechoslovak people could be blinded by the subterfuges of the Communists, the efforts of the Czech National Socialist Party to stem the Communist advance over a long period were not appreciated until it was too late. It is further very well shown how minutely and how well the Communists plan each step to a coup d'état for years ahead.

Ripka shows that the work accomplished in London by the Czech refugees was being threatened all along by a plan being prepared in detail in Moscow. While Benes sought above all else to create in international circles the political conditions which would be favourable to the liberation and economic and political reconstruction of the country, the Politburo in Moscow was preparing in detail a plot to allow the Communists to seize power immediately after the liberation.

The tragedy of the events, from the Communists' receiving the very portfolios they wanted to further their ends in the Kosice Government of 1945 to Benes' long delayed acceptance of Gottwald's list of Ministers in February 1948, is very well brought out. Benes' declaration of his deep democratic faith in his one last effort to influence the Communists is very moving.

Only on one point can the author shed no light. What happened in the Hradcany Castle during the fatal morning of February 25th, 1948, when Benes against his will accepted Gottwald's list of Ministers and it was announced that the President had accepted the resignation of the National Socialist Ministers, which they in fact had never offered, is only known by a very few Communist Ministers and it is very doubtful if the facts will ever be made public.

One cannot but admire the fight to the bitter end put up by the National Socialists. But one is left with the feeling that the number of political parties existing in Czechoslovakia and kept in being by the proportional representation system of voting militated against the giving of real support to the National Socialists in their heroic

fight to maintain democracy in Czechoslovakia. The weakness lay not in the Czechs as persons, but in their political system.

MORA BURNET

OUTLINE OF A METAPHYSICS. By Franklin J. Matchette. pp. 108. Philosophical Library, New York, \$3.75.

It was to offset the tendency of the specialist to exaggerate the importance of his own line that Bradley transcribed from his notebook in the Preface to his essay in metaphysics: "Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, but to find these reasons is no less an instinct". Even if this were the whole story, which it is not, there would still be the psychological interest in the revealing character of speculative thinking. What would one expect, for example, from the author of this book, an authentic American business man, highly versatile and prosperous in his business ventures and no less happily successful in his family life? An amateur of philosophy, in his later years he turned his mind to his last adventure. If Pragmatism had not already been invented by the professional, one might expect it to burst out here in all its exuberance. Instead, the business man comforts his spirit with a true-blue metaphysical Idealism. He brings to his exposition a forceful intelligence, not so much free from the jargon of the schools (as his academic sponsor claims in the Introduction) as unqualified by the subtlety of the specialist. His speculation is boldly and straightforwardly unfolded, with the result that one sees here very strikingly, as in a caricature, the essential features of traditional metaphysical speculation, and its reassuring function. Ordinary people have their peculiar theoretical bothers, and sooner or later find a formula, a form of words, which satisfies them. The more sophisticated, the trained and learned minds, have all the common inherited bothers on their minds and require a highly complicated alleviation. But it is the same thing, and here in this more unusual case of the powerful amateur it comes out clearly: we see the happy inventor satisfying himself with an elaborate form of words. Can metaphysics ever do better? It is tempting to say yes, but doubtful. All the same, metaphysics will remain as delightful, as expressive, as significant, and as necessary and irrepressible, as poetry or fiction. Man is a metaphysical animal (the truth of Bradley's caution) and the developed capacity for metaphysics is a supreme exercise of imaginative intelligence.

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Surrounding human beings is the weather, it impinges on their

lives affecting their habits and ideas, even altering the constitution of their bodies. Weather is a subject that makes poets sing, and the most prosaically minded business man may, by the shock of a slight change, perhaps by feeling crisp snow instead of the city pavement beneath his feet, regain the simple excitement of being alive. In spite of this we treat weather abominably, making it the most conventional stock in conversations, too often implying that weather only matters to us if it be such as will suit our purposes. Like other things made use of, the thing in itself is hardly cared for. Is the editor of *Weather News Front* out to revive a lost sensibility, to tear down the backcloth of convention which covers the real background? Anyhow he may do this for some people.

Edward Ardizzone is the perfect illustrator for this paper, the January issue is worth buying for the cover alone. It epitomises the sensations of sheltering in farm outhouses during heavy showers. The format of the paper is so good that one is sorry that the title (in a pleasing blue) has an elegant flamboyance which seems unrelated to the rest: in no-wise balancing the other type or the downright drawing beneath. It is likeably, amusingly written. Perhaps future numbers will find room for a small section of plain scientific fact which might give a nice contrast of texture. U.E.

CORRESPONDENCE

Pacifism

Mr. W. Arnold Hall tells us that in rejecting Pacifism I appealed in my article to the fear of insecurity. In point of fact, I reject Pacifism (with whose high humanitarian sentiments I have already expressed the greatest affinity) because of its manifest futility in a world constituted as ours is at the present day. We are living in times of the greatest possible danger. Is it not right, then, to cast aside what can in no realistic, appreciable way counter or remove such danger?

Mr. Hall, admitting that there is about much of the rosy Pacifism of which I wrote, implies that there is another sort, a mature Pacifism. A Pacifism that believes that—to quote Mr. Hall—“its witness and suffering contribute towards the creation of a subsequent ideal society, whether or not those who ‘die in the faith’ live personally to ‘receive the promises.’” But to my way of thinking, there is no clear distinction between this kind of Pacifism and any other. They all have this idea in common: that those who are martyrs for their Pacifist faith affect in some deep and profound sense their fellow men and women and the future of human society. I can only think that there is slender truth in this. Idealism, which this view

of life certainly embodies, has much to commend it. But a Pacifism that jibs at practical proposals to create conditions in which peace may become a splendid reality is pitifully ineffective, despite its unquestionable moral and spiritual content. That is my point.

If I write as a pragmatist in this matter I make no apology; for it is as a pragmatist that I condemn Pacifism.

G. I. BENNETT

Civilization, Marxism and Social Democracy

In your note on Admiral Weston's letter you claim to have "consistently and actively supported the British Labour Party for more than twenty years." I can claim to have supported it consistently for twenty-eight (1905-1933) and actively for twenty-five. My adhesion began before there *was* a Labour Party—when there was still only a Labour Representation Committee. Later I worked in close association with Hyndman, the "grand old man" of British Social Democracy. Incidentally the phrase "Social Democracy" was not coined by Lenin, but by Bronterre O'Brien, the Chartist, to describe those who were not content with political democracy, but were determined to use it to revolutionise the social system.

I have lived to see the name of "Social Democracy" wrested from its original meaning and applied by such as you to a "common faith" which has no common feature except faith in the parliamentary machine. It does not necessarily, I gather from you, even connote Socialism. It covers apparently also capitalism and Christian Democracy (the nice, new, continental alias for Toryism!) provided they are not formally Fascist. For you say in your Commentary that "the near future has room for only two alternatives, communism and what may be well called social democracy." As you can hardly pretend that American "rugged individualism" does not exist or will not be a power in "the near future," I can only infer that it, too, is "social democracy."

And then you are surprised that I, an old Socialist, find adhesion to this omnium-gatherum "distasteful"! I find it not only distasteful, but a menace to human existence. It was not Marxists, but men whom you embrace as "Social democrats," who dropped the first atomic bombs and now brandish the hydrogen bomb at us. I propose to fight them like hell to my last breath.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

(The trouble is that I think the social analysis on which Mr. Robertson relies is simple-minded, and he thinks the same of mine; therefore there can be no useful discussion between us. Nevertheless, with regard to his comment I should like to say this. Social democracy is not an omnium-gatherum nor

merely a political machine: it is itself a social ferment and the political machine is producing in present circumstances considerable social content, the rudiments of a common society. Of course there are elements within social democracy in the U.S.A. and on the Continent and even here which are repugnant to humanists. The point is that the communist line strengthens these elements and makes a struggle *à outrance* sooner or later unavoidable, whereas those who oppose them from the inside bid for a piecemeal victory which avoids the human disaster of totalitarian rule. H.J.B.)

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